

Caring for America's **HEROES**

OKLAHOMA CITY VA MEDICAL CENTER

FALL 2007 VOL. 7 NO. 3



Spirituality and Health p2

Literacy Assistance
for Veterans p6

Nutrition Know-How:
Good Carbs, Bad Carbs p7

Spirituality and Health

Terry Ann Sparks, J.D., M.Div., Staff Chaplain

THERE ARE MANY THINGS IN OUR LIVES WE CANNOT CONTROL. The economy changes and we suddenly find ourselves laid off from a good job. Aging takes its toll on the body, sometimes in ways medical science cannot correct. A friend or family member makes a bad decision that causes us emotional pain. The list goes on and on.

One of the things we can control is our spirituality. We have free choice in what we believe about God or a Higher Power—even the freedom to believe that a power greater than ourselves does not exist. We have free choice about whom we are close to emotionally. We have free

choice in how we treat ourselves, whether with kindness or with harsh judgment. Choices about God or a Higher Power, about our relationships, and about how we treat ourselves all are parts of our spirituality. Sometimes these choices are difficult to make, but we do have control over these choices, and thus over our spirituality.

A healthy spirituality can impact our physical and mental health in a very positive way. When we have a healthy

spirituality, our hearts and minds have a place to rest, a place to call home, a place that is nurturing and compassionate. A relationship we have chosen with God or a Higher Power can give us a resting place.

People who are not comfortable with a traditional sense of God can find a quiet, nurturing place inside themselves where they feel connected with the love that is in the world around them. This connection with love can provide a resting place for the heart. When they are positive, our relationships with other people can give our hearts a place of loving refuge. As we begin to develop a sense of compassion and caring toward ourselves, our minds begin to experience a peaceful, quiet home.

These three components of

spirituality can have a beneficial effect on how we experience life, both physically and mentally. We will still have physical and mental difficulties, but with our hearts and minds at home and at rest, our quality of life will tend to be better.

We have free choice in what we believe about God or a Higher Power—even the freedom to believe that a power greater than ourselves does not exist.

We have free choice about whom we are close to emotionally. We have free choice in how we treat ourselves, whether with kindness or with harsh judgment.

HealthBriefs

TAKING THREE OR FOUR SHORT, BRISK WALKS THROUGHOUT THE DAY can lower blood pressure for people with prehypertension (systolic pressure ranging from 120 to 139 mm Hg or diastolic pressure ranging from 80 to 89 mm Hg) the same amount as taking one 40-minute walk.

The study, published in the *Journal of Hypertension*, found people who walked on a treadmill continuously for 40 minutes, and those who walked four times for 10 minutes over the course of 3.5 hours, all experienced a drop of systolic blood pressure of 5.4 to 5.6 mm Hg and diastolic blood pressure of 3.2 mm Hg. A reduction of 5 mm Hg in systolic blood pressure has been reported to substantially reduce mortality and reduce the incidence of stroke and coronary heart disease.

EXPOSURE TO LOUD NOISES IS ONE OF THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF HEARING LOSS. But how loud is too loud? Prolonged exposure to noise above 85 decibels can hurt your hearing. The noise from power lawn mowers, tractors, and hand drills is in the 90- to 98-decibel range, and portable music players, such as iPods and MP3 players, can produce sounds as loud as 130 decibels.

To protect your hearing, the Mayo Clinic suggests:

- **Wear hearing protection** around loud sounds, even when doing everyday tasks such as mowing the lawn.
- **Turn down the volume on headphones.** If the person next to you can hear what you're listening to, the music is too loud.



The time and effort we put into developing our spirituality can bring great benefits to other parts of our lives as well. When our hearts and minds are more at peace, more at rest, more at home, we tend to feel more positive about ourselves and more hopeful about the future. A positive, hopeful outlook can help promote greater physical and mental health. We do have control over whether our spirituality is life-giving and positive.

If you do not have a sense that your heart and mind have a home or are at rest, you can ask for help. You can ask a person you trust, or God, or your Higher Power to help you find that place of peace. If you do not have a person you can ask, or do not feel comfortable asking God or your Higher Power for help, you can begin to treat yourself with greater kindness and compassion. Seeing yourself through kind and

compassionate eyes can help make a home for your heart and mind.

Additionally, the staff of Chaplain Service can help with these issues. The chaplains are trained in a wide variety of spirituality issues, including recovery issues, 12-step spirituality, the spirituality of living with chronic pain, and the spirituality of living with chronic mental illness.

To contact a chaplain, come by the office on the ground floor (GA-141) across the hall from the chapel and ask to speak with a chaplain, or call **270-5138** for an appointment.

The chaplain's office is open for outpatient visits Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Walk-ins are welcome. The chapel itself is open daily for prayer and meditation, except on holidays, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Chaplain Service can help you on the path to a positive, life-giving spirituality.

Family Education

PROGRAMS AVAILABLE AT OKLAHOMA CITY VAMC

Do you have a family member or friend who struggles with mental illness? You are not alone.

In the United States, one in four families has a loved one who struggles with mental illness. Caregiving can be very demanding and stressful. The Family Mental Health Program has created the **S.A.F.E.** Program: Support And Family Education, Mental Health Facts for Families. Family members and friends are invited to a 90-minute, confidential, free workshop on the second Monday of each month. Refreshments are provided, and reservations are not needed.

Attending the **S.A.F.E.** Program provides opportunities to:

- Talk with other family members in similar situations
 - Learn more about causes, treatments, and medications for mental illness
 - Receive emotional support and encouragement
 - Ask doctors questions about mental illness
 - Improve your ability to take care of yourself as a caregiver
- Each session has a specific topic (such as "What Causes Mental Illness?" "Depression and Its Impact on the Family" and "P.T.S.D. and Its Impact on the Family"). Past participants have appreciated the handouts and support provided in the sessions, both from professionals and other families.

For more information, please contact Dr. Michelle Sherman, Director of the Family Mental Health Program, at **405-270-5183**.

Fall CALENDAR

THERAPEUTIC RECREATION AND CREATIVE ARTS THERAPY



Arts/Crafts

Monday through Friday, 8–10 a.m.
This class offers a variety of crafts for persons wishing to develop new skills and hobbies. Crafts include ceramics, leather, model building, painting kits, wood kits, etc.



Art Therapy

Sometimes it is difficult to express yourself verbally. Art therapy offers the opportunity to work through psychological issues using various arts media. Individual sessions are scheduled with the Art Therapist.

Creative Writing

Mondays, 10:30 a.m.–noon. Whether it be prose or poetry, writing often can open avenues for self-expression. Students can look forward to venues for being published.

Drumming

Mondays, 2:30–3:30 p.m., and Wednesdays, 1–2 p.m. If you have a heartbeat, you have rhythm. Join this class and learn various techniques of hand drumming using African drums. Drums are provided.

Field Trips

Second Saturday of every month, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (unless otherwise scheduled). Trips are to the Oklahoma City Elks Lodge #417 for a billiard tournament and bingo. Lunch is provided. To participate, veterans must be enrolled in an Art Therapy or Therapeutic Recreation class.

Jewelry Making

Mondays, 10 a.m.–noon.
Express your creativity by designing one-of-a-kind jewelry. Learn glass fusing, beadwork, wire wrap, bead and wirework, enameling, and making jewelry with materials such as paper, leather, and fun foam.

Leisure Education

By appointment only. Therapy sessions deal with leisure planning, identification of community resources, barriers to participation, attitudes about leisure and other issues related to leisure and recreation participation.

Literacy

By appointment only. Learn to experience the joy of reading. Improve your reading ability to better manage your own medical care. One-on-one training is provided to improve reading and spelling skills and increase your understanding of what you read. Offered in conjunction with Literacy Link.

Open Studio

Thursdays, 1–3 p.m. If you have an interest in developing your leisure skills through art, this class is for you. Materials provided.

Photography

Fridays, 10 a.m.–noon. Introductory classes teach the use of the 35-mm camera. Learn about f-stops, lighting, film speed, and more. Field trips are included and cameras are provided.



Pottery

Tuesdays, 1–3 p.m. Working with clay—either molding it or throwing it on a wheel—can be a satisfying and self-fulfilling experience.

For more information:

If you are interested or want further information about creative art and/or therapeutic recreation classes, call **405-270-0501, ext. 3487 or 3488**, or contact your primary care physician for a referral.

T'ai Chi

Fridays, 11 a.m.–noon. This ancient art of meditation and exercise is a sure way to promote relaxation and stress management.

Therapeutic Exercise

Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m. Whether or not you have physical limitations, exercise is healthy for you. The therapist will provide individual instruction on the proper exercise for you.

Walking Stick-Making Class

Tuesdays, 8–10 a.m. and 1–3 p.m., and Fridays, 8–10 a.m. Design, paint, and craft your own walking stick. Materials are provided for \$10/stick.

Women Veterans Group

Thursdays, 10 a.m.–noon. Learn a new game, craft, or leisure skill and be with other women veterans. Field trips are included once a month.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF Quitting Smoking

When you kick the cigarette habit, you don't have to wait weeks or months to reap the health benefits of your new lifestyle. Here, according to the American Cancer Society, are the changes that take place in your body when you give up smoking.

Within 20 minutes

- Blood pressure and pulse return to normal.
- Body temperature of hands and feet increases to normal.

After 8 hours

- Carbon monoxide level in blood drops to normal.
- Oxygen level in blood increases to normal.

After 48 hours

- Chance of heart attack decreases.
- Nerve endings start to regrow.
- Ability to smell and taste things is enhanced.

After 72 hours

- Bronchial tubes relax, making breathing easier.
- Lung capacity increases.

After 2 weeks to 3 months

- Circulation improves. Walking becomes easier.
- Lung function increases up to 30 percent.

After 1 to 9 months

- Coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue, and shortness of breath decrease.
- Cilia regrow in lungs, increasing ability to handle mucus, clean lungs, and reduce infection.
- Body's overall energy level increases.

After 5 to 10 years

- Lung cancer death rate decreases to nearly that of a non-smoker.
- Precancerous cells are replaced. Risk for other cancers—such as those in the mouth, larynx, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas—decreases.

For more information:

Stop Smoking Program
VA Medical Center, Oklahoma City
405-270-0501, Ext. 3219

Free Educational Services for Veterans

Are you interested in continuing your education? The Veterans Upward Bound Program may be able to help.

Services are available free to all veterans with 180 days or more of active duty or separated medically with a discharge other than dishonorable and who have less than a bachelor's degree.

The only other qualification is that the veteran plans to attend college or vocational school or prepare for a GED.

Services include, but are not limited to:

- Access to tutors, computer lab, and ongoing advisory
- Upgrading skills in the areas of writing, math, and/or reading
- Evaluation and testing for school readiness
- Basic computer skills (classes held each month)
- Degree/career guidance
- Information about colleges and technical schools
- Financial aid guidance
- Study skills — speed-reading, test and note taking, stress and time management
- Essay writing
- Conversational Spanish

To qualify, veterans should bring copies of their DD214 and tax forms to the Upward Bound Office located at 6232 SE 15th St., Midwest City, OK 73110, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. If you qualify, you may be entitled to a \$40-per-month stipend allowance as you work on your skills. Testing is normally scheduled on Wednesdays at 1 p.m. Stop by or call Nyree Cunningham or Jennifer Carnes at 405-869-2200.

Literacy Assistance *for Veterans*

by Susan Bishop, MSTRS

THERE IS A NEW PROGRAM FOR VETERANS in Therapeutic Recreation, and Wib Truby, volunteer literacy tutor for the past 15 years, wants veterans to know about it.

"I have always felt strongly about staying active and busy. Because I can no longer work at a paying job, I decided to create a job for myself by coming to the VA and tutoring veterans needing assistance with literacy," the Navy Viet Nam-era veteran said as he sipped coffee from a mug.

Literacy Link is affiliated with the Midwest City Library and ProLiteracy America, and Wib uses their resources to teach and facilitate veterans wishing to either learn to read or improve their reading skills, including comprehension. "Each One—Teach One" is the Literacy Link slogan. Veterans are seen individually. An evaluation is conducted in the first

session to determine the veteran's level of reading and writing comprehension, and subsequent appointments are made to tutor the veteran in successful reading and writing skills.

Wib related a story about a 19-year-old woman he tutored who had four children and was third generation on public assistance. Jean (not her real name) had dropped out of school in the eighth grade, and when her eldest daughter came home from school one day and asked for help with reading, Jean could not help her. She was only reading at a second-grade level at her initial evaluation with Wib. By the time she finished the tutoring program, Jean had taken the Graduate Record Examination and passed it with flying colors. Wib saw her a few

months later in a grocery store, and she was thrilled to tell him she had enrolled at Rose State College and had passed her first-semester final exams. She now has a job and no longer receives public assistance.

Veterans can succeed—just like Jean!

Assistance with spelling, phonetics, math, cursive writing, basic reading, and word comprehension skills also are included if desired. Any interested veteran may contact a staff member in Therapeutic Recreation (Health Wing) for additional information, or call 405-270-0501, ext. 3487.

No veteran need live without the joy experienced from reading!





Nutrition

Know-How:

Good Carbs, Bad Carbs

CARBOHYDRATES ARE THE BODY'S MOST READILY AVAILABLE SOURCE OF ENERGY. Even though they've gotten a bad rap lately, the right kinds of carbs are a necessary part of a healthy diet.

If you don't know the difference between good carbs and bad carbs, look at it this way: Apples and Twinkies can both be characterized as carbs, but their benefits or lack thereof are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

"Many people are confused about carbs because of the low-carb diet craze of the past several years," says Dawn Jackson Blatner, R.D., a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association in Chicago. "As a result, some people aren't getting the nutrients they need because they're avoiding carbs altogether."

Why bad carbs are bad

In simple terms, bad carbs lack fiber and digest quickly, causing blood sugar surges that can lead to weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, and other health problems. They're also:

- Calorie dense, so they contain a large number of calories in a small amount of food.
- Not filling; as a result, you end up eating again soon because your hunger isn't satisfied.
- Lacking in nutrients. Typical bad carbs include soda, cookies,

pastries, white bread, cake, candy, potato chips, and pie. These high-calorie, high-sugar, high-fat foods are made with highly refined and processed flour, fat, and sugar.

Why good carbs are so good

Good carbs come from carbohydrate-rich foods that are close to the form that occurs in nature, such as fresh fruit or brown rice.

Good carbs are broken down more slowly in the body, which makes it easier for the body to regulate them and avoid the spike in blood sugar caused by refined foods. Good-for-you carbs also can:

- Reduce your risk for diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and cancer
- Fill you up with less food because they're high in fiber and water
- Provide a wide variety of healthy phytochemicals (plant chemicals), vitamins, minerals, and fiber

"Foods containing good carbs include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and low-fat dairy," says Blatner.

In with the good

The following strategies can help you reduce the amount of bad carbs you eat and increase the amount of good ones.

- Read food labels. If the first few ingredients are sugar, honey or molasses, high-fructose corn syrup, and/or white flour, they're bad carbs and should be limited.
- Clear your cupboards of junk foods, such as chips and crackers and cookies made from bleached white flour.
- Stock up on nutritious fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables. When buying canned and frozen ones, look for the terms "no sugar added" and "low sodium."
- Instead of sugar-filled sodas, choose water or unsweetened seltzers, decaf diet soft drinks, and iced tea.
- Be wary of so-called "low-carb" foods. Consumer reports found many packaged low-carb foods are actually higher in calories than the regular products.

"Choosing healthy foods and good carbs most of the time can improve your health, slim your waist, and lower your food costs," says Blatner. "It's a habit worth getting used to."

For more information:

American Dietetic Association,
www.eatright.org, enter "carbohydrates" in the search function.

IMPORTANT Telephone Numbers

Primary Care

To schedule or cancel an appointment with your Primary Care Provider, call **405-290-1890** or toll-free **1-866-835-5273** Monday–Friday (except holidays), 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

All Other Clinics, Including Specialty Clinics

To schedule or cancel an appointment in one of the specialty clinics, call **405-270-0501** and enter the extension (see list below), Monday–Friday (except holidays), 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Alzheimer's..... | Ext. 5797 |
| Arthritis..... | Ext. 3944 |
| Audiology..... | Ext. 5490 |
| Bone Density..... | Ext. 5159 |
| Cardiology..... | Ext. 3268 |
| CAT Scan..... | Ext. 4135 |
| Chaplain Service..... | Ext. 5138 |
| Dean McGee Eye Institute..... | Ext. 5831 |
| Dental Clinic..... | 405-270-5139 |
| Dental Clinic Lawton..... | 580-357-6981 |
| Dermatology..... | Ext. 3944 |
| Diabetes Education..... | Ext. 3284 |
| Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT)..... | Ext. 2368 |
| Eye..... | Ext. 5280 |
| Geriatrics & Home-Based Care..... | Ext. 5198 |
| GI Clinic..... | Ext. 3944 |
| Hematology..... | Ext. 3944 |
| Infectious Disease..... | Ext. 3284 |
| Infusion Clinic..... | Ext. 5497 |
| Mental Health..... | Ext. 5183 |
| MRI..... | Ext. 5706 |
| Nephrology (Renal)..... | Ext. 3284 |
| Neurology/Rehab..... | Ext. 3365 |
| North May Avenue Eye Clinic..... | Ext. 4716 |
| Nuclear Medicine..... | Ext. 4284 |
| Oncology..... | Ext. 3944 |
| Outpatient Surgery..... | Ext. 5855 |
| Prosthetics/Orthotics..... | Ext. 5612 |
| Radiology..... | Ext. 4135 |
| Speech Pathology..... | Ext. 3887 |
| Social Work..... | Ext. 5574 |
| Surgery Clinics..... | Ext. 3379 |
| Ultrasound..... | Ext. 4135 |
| Urology..... | Ext. 3018 |
| Vascular Interventional..... | Ext. 3979 |
| Women's Clinic..... | Ext. 3379 |

Automated Prescription Refill System

To request a prescription refill, check on your prescription status, or get your account balance 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call **405-290-1610** or toll-free **1-800-694-8387**. Please have your Social Security and prescription numbers ready when calling.

Check Upcoming Appointments

To check upcoming appointments, call **1-800-694-8387**. If you believe you have an appointment that is not listed, call the clinic directly. Call **405-270-0501** and the appropriate extension.

After-Hours Care and Emergencies

After normal business hours, holidays, and/or weekends, staff is available to assess your symptoms and medical concerns. Call **405-290-1890** or toll-free at **1-866-835-5273**. Please note that staff is unable to schedule or cancel appointments.

Compensation and Pension Claims

Veterans who have questions about compensation and pension claims may contact:

VA Regional Office

125 S. Main Street
Muskogee, OK 74401
1-800-827-1000

National Cemetery Administration

Veterans and their spouses can get the latest information on VA burial benefits, including detailed eligibility criteria, by calling Fort Sill National Cemetery at **580-492-3200**.

Editor: **Steven R. Orwig, M.D., Associate Chief of Staff for Education**

Editorial Board
Patient Health Education
Committee

Special Thanks
Pictures—**Tony Caballero**

Vet Center

The Oklahoma City Vet Center provides core services of outreach, readjustment counseling for combat stress and military sexual trauma/harassment, and follow-up, which are supplemented by numerous ancillary services such as individual, marital, family, group counseling, and employment and veterans' benefits counseling. The Vet Center is located at 3033 N. Walnut, Suite 101W, Oklahoma City, OK 73105, or call **405-270-5185**.

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Lawton Outpatient Clinic
Building 4303, Pitman & Thomas
Fort Sill, OK 73503
580-353-1131

Veteran's Clinic of South Central OK
527 W. Third Street
Konawa, OK 74849
580-925-3286

Internal Medicine Associates
215 N. Third
Ponca City, OK 74601
580-762-1777

Veterans Clinic of North Texas
1800 Seventh Street
Wichita Falls, TX 76301-4388
940-723-2373

Satellite Clinic

North May Avenue Outpatient Clinic
2915 Pine Ridge Road
Oklahoma City, OK 73120
405-290-1890, option 8

The Oklahoma City VAMC staff strives to provide you with exceptional health care. It is our goal to help you improve your overall health and well-being. If you have concerns about your care and/or safety in the hospital and you feel they have not been addressed, please contact the Patient Advocate (room GF-216) or the Director's Office (room 1A-105).

If your concern is not resolved by the Patient Advocate or Director's Office, you may contact The Joint Commission by either calling **1-800-994-6610** or e-mailing **complaint@jointcommission.org**.